

A Best Practices Point of View from



Adopting a Patient Portal for your Dental Practice: A Smart Business Decision



Adopting Mobile Communication for your Dental Practice: A Smart Business Decision

Where's your mobile device right now?

If you're part of the vast majority of North Americans who have embraced mobile like a second skin, your smartphone is likely vibrating as you read this. It may be pumping out your favourite, customized playlist or letting you know you're within a two-minute walk to the best.sale.ever. It's letting you know your kids have arrived home safely, and warming up your car in the snowy parking lot.

It has your attention.

It's no longer simply cell phones and feature phones that feed our around-the-clock umbilical addiction. The early corporate crackberry cord has given way to the ubiquitous smartphone – the device that quickly and dramatically altered the mobile landscape. ComScore recently reported that over 80% of smartphone users regularly access their mobile browser and applications compared to 20% of feature phone users. Families, causes, employers, marketers and – yes – dental practices are wisely tapping its power and creating ever-evolving opportunities to connect with you. And, for the most part, you love it.

The communication standard for today's patient-focused organizations

For many, checking the mobile device is the last thing we do at night and the first thing we do in the morning. Smartphone owners report using their device more frequently today for mobile email and texting than to actually make phone calls. In Bell Media's fourth annual "Canadian Mobile Media Snapshot", users voiced their opinion of mobile marketing:

- ✓ 82% agree it's a good way to learn about new products and brands;
- ✓ 80% believe it can influence them to investigate a product or service;
- ✓ 71% accept that it can change the way they think about a product or service; and
- ✓ 65% report that it has the power to influence them to BUY a product or service.

So SMS – short message system, or text messaging – has become the communication standard for today’s marketing- and consumer-focused organizations. Patient-centric strategies cater to convenience. They build one-on-one relationships with existing and new clients, providing personalized options and direct connections. They offer quick, easy solutions to day-to-day routines and tasks. A click-and-it’s-done or a 10-word message fits this bill perfectly.

Immediacy is a most significant benefit: SMS is real time. And, again, it has our attention. Consider these facts:

- The average “open rate” for SMS is 98%. For email marketing, it hovers around 11%¹
- 97% of mobile subscribers will read a text message within 15 minutes of receipt; 84% will respond within 1 hour²

And this relates to my Dental practice... how?

It relates to every organization that expects to compete in today’s over-encumbered, time-starved marketplace. It applies to every business that hopes to win client engagement and loyalty. It makes sense for any dental practice looking for ways to retain their existing patients and attract new ones.

Emailed and texted appointment reminders and confirmation is just the beginning. A well designed Patient Portal can put all of the benefits of electronic interaction at a practice manager’s fingertips: appointment eCards, alerts for retrieval of patient statements and receipts, myriad form templates for patient information gathering... even patient follow-up service surveys!. When the portal module is fully integrated with a dental practice’s database and software, remarkable, measurable improvements in their overall practice performance are realized.

Two important benefits emerge: client satisfaction and administrative efficiency.

¹ <http://www.mailermailer.com/resources/metrics/2011/open-rates.rwp>

² Nielson Mobile

To date, reported client feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. Patients embrace the convenience and ease of SMS interaction to:

- Receive reminders of the need to book follow-ups for themselves and their family members
- Receive confirmations of scheduled appointments
- Receive follow-ups for recommended treatment
- Stay on top of cancellation opportunity lists
- Update personal data
- Refer new patients

A User Study recently conducted by ABELDent confirmed that the time savings resulting from the elimination of telephone tag for these functions can be significant. One Office Manager reported that by moving from printing, addressing, stamping and mailing reminder cards and day-prior phone messages to a methodical, automated SMS approach, she saved at least 6 hours per week. That's over \$6,000 in annualized savings, without even considering the more revenue-producing initiatives that she was able to undertake using those recovered six hours every week.

Patient appreciation and business productivity were optimized when the following techniques were adopted:

Patient Communication Best Practices using ABELDent Portal

1. Personalize your emails

Using a simple merge tool, the appeal of your email can be immediately doubled by replacing "Dear Patient" with "Dear Mary".

2. Be specific

While brevity is key to effective use of SMS, don't forget to identify your practice as well as the date and time of the appointment.

- "The team at Main Street Dental looks forward to seeing you on January 15 at 2 pm."
- "A friendly reminder of your appointment at Lakeview Dentistry on January 15 at 2 pm."

3. Incite action

Offering a simple “click to confirm” option encourages positive action. It should also incite patients to contact your office if a re-book is required. While no one wants to promote re-scheduling, a re-book is always better than a no-show.

4. Maintain a short-notice list

Easily manage an ongoing list of patients waiting for cancellations or those with last-minute flexibility. First to respond gets the time slot...

5. Use your data to get the best outcomes

Different patients respond to different types of contact. Keep data on patient preferences up to date and communicate with your patient accordingly. People who don't respond to email at all may respond instantly to a text, while some patients don't use SMS at all. Experiment with the timing and frequency of your messages to identify what works best for your practice.

6. Obtain permissions

Although you have an existing business relationship with your patients, it's always smart to ask permission to contact patients via email or SMS. Your portal and sign-in kiosk can simplify the collection of opt-in data by asking their preferred method of communication.

7. Keep in touch

Create legitimate opportunities to connect with your patients between appointments. Use the integration with ABELDent's Treatment Manager to follow up with patients with unscheduled treatment and integrated On Demand messaging to communicate with individual patients in advance of or after appointments.

8. Ask for feedback and ask for referrals

A satisfied patient is often your best advertisement. Post-appointment follow-up communication will help personalize your patients' experience, reinforce the best assets of your practice and even help you isolate areas for improvement. Encourage patients to refer to your practice and offer incentives for happy clients who oblige.

9. Learn from early adopters

Turn to experienced portal users for ongoing tips and techniques. ABELDent developers are constantly improving the software to accommodate feedback from clients. Regular webinars and newsletters contain valuable, up-to-the-minute ideas. Getting opt-in permission on their patient registration forms? Or ask patients to check off their preferred method of communication?

In a business model where client communication can fall to six or nine-month intervals, why wouldn't you want to take advantage of a quick, convenient and welcome opportunity to build better relationships with your patients?

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Easy to use and fully integrated, ABELDent offers efficient product implementation with customized training, patient/practitioner portals, unparalleled customer service and around-the-clock support to thousands of Dentists across North America.

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